

VZCZCXRO6116
RR RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHVI #2325/01 2431521
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 311521Z AUG 07
FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8488
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VIENNA 002325

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/30/2022

TAGS: [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [KNNP](#) [AU](#)

SUBJECT: AUSTRIA MISSILE DEFENSE: FURTHER EMBASSY ACTION

REF: VIENNA 2209

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Scott Kilner. Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) Embassy discussions with MOD, MFA, and diplomatic contacts suggest some governmental disagreement on handling the missile defense (MD) issue as well as a degree of disarray within the Defense Ministry. For domestic political reasons, the MD issue could continue to rumble in Austria. An Embassy press backgrounder revealed a striking lack of knowledge of the facts of the proposed deployment in at least the print media, but also an openness to further dialogue. The influential daily "Die Presse" has opined that Defense Minister Darabos' and similar comments are unhelpful to Austria in the EU. On August 30, "Die Presse" published Amb. McCaw's op-ed article on U.S. MD policy (English translation sent to EUR/AGS). End Summary.

Defense Ministry: Disarray and Discomfort

2. (C) DCM, accompanied by Econ/Pol Couns, met on the morning of August 30 with the Diplomatic Advisor to the Defense Minister, Juergen Meindl. At Meindl's request, the meeting was re-located from the Defense Ministry to the Chancery. Meindl's apparent purpose in the meeting was to convey something of the Ministerial environment. On substance, he stuck closely to the points he had made in his Aug. 24 phone conversation with the DCM. In the office call, however, he repeatedly asked the U.S. to bear in mind that Darabos was a politician and the extremely tense situation within the Grand Coalition (he reported personally finding the situation extremely difficult). Meindl also revealed that the CHOD staff had not provided a report to the Minister on their April consultations with DASD Fata. Meindl, noting that the proposed European MD deployment would have a real impact on Austrian security and was an issue of public concern, intimated that further comments from the Minister were possible.

3. (C) DCM acknowledged the legitimacy of the debate, but expressed concern about the tenor of the Minister's and others' comments and asked that future statements be more reasonable. In response to Meindl's comments that neither he nor the Minister was a technical expert, Econ/Pol Couns pointed out that a basic understanding of the system and the technical framework in which it was deployed were essential to a reasonable debate about the issue.

Czechs Pissed; See Domestic Agenda

4. (C) Over lunch later Aug. 30, Czech DCM Cistecky confirmed to Econ/Pol Couns Prague's unhappiness with Darabos. Foreign

Minister Schwarzenberg, whose criticisms of Darabos have been widely covered in Austria, is personally following the issue through SMS messages, according to Cistecky. Schwarzenberg is particularly upset that Darabos' comments imply a Russian "droit de regarde" over Czech/eastern European security policy. Cistecky maintained that the reasons for Darabos' comments were exclusively domestic -- the need to score points for the SPOe and a desire to put Foreign Minister Plassnik in difficulty. An anti-MD stance also would benefit Darabos (a former party General Secretary) within the party and in the European Social Democratic movement which, Cistecky said, was coordinating a campaign against MD.

Media Openings

15. (C) At a backgrounder for press led by the DCM, with support from the DATT and Econ/Pol Couns, media representatives acknowledged deep suspicion about U.S motives for the deployment, but were also open to further dialogue and appeared to be receptive to both the technical information and strategic arguments offered for the deployment. Some claims, for example that the deployment could not defend against attacks in Europe, revealed deep ignorance about the planned deployment. Others, focused on deterrence, suggested an ongoing Cold War frame of reference among the journalists. There were no stories drawing from the backgrounder in the Aug. 31 press. However, a commentary in the centrist "Die Presse" wrote that Darabos' statements served Moscow's interests and damaged Austrian interests, especially in the EU.

Cabinet Disarray

VIENNA 00002325 002 OF 002

16. (C) In her initial public comments, FonMin Plassnik also referred to Darabos' remarks as eliciting enthusiastic comment from Moscow. MFA PolDir Mayr-Harting told DCM Aug. 31 that Plassnik had made a similar point during a cabinet discussion of the issue earlier in the week. Mayr-Harting quoted the FM as stating that "Austria cannot be a branch-office for Russia." Chancellor Gusenbauer has defended, albeit in softer language, Darabos' critique of the deployment and rejected outside criticism. Though Plassnik can hardly be considered a supporter of the deployment, the fact that she and Darabos are unable even to agree on how to handle the matter is unsurprising given the cabinet's internal stresses. Unless Gusenbauer intervenes to stop the squabble, it could well continue.

Kilner